

On Accountability: Towards a White Middle-Class Queer 'Post Identity Politics Identity Politics'

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Abstract

Writing about white middle-class queer subjectivities is a necessarily difficult task. Partly this is due to ongoing debates over identity politics (and indeed post identity politics), and partly because writing as a white middle-class queer always appears to invoke a particular 'yes but' ('yes I am white and middle-class but I am also queer'). In this paper I outline one way of engaging in a white middle-class queer praxis that takes into account these two issues, and uses them as a starting place from which to think about the intersections of whiteness, queerness and class in potentially novel ways. Drawing on the work of Jodi Dean, I elaborate what I term a 'white middle-class queer post identity politics identity politics' that centres issues of reciprocity and accountability by considering the role of others in the constitution of the self. Recognising the fundamental indebtedness that arises from this represents one means through which to negotiate a speaking position as a white middle-class queer that evokes an altogether different 'yes but', one that is mindful of race and class privilege.

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Introduction

Despite a rapidly growing body of research on whiteness and race privilege, the 'disclosure' of one's whiteness continues to be something of a novelty for many white people (though a novelty that holds the potential to lead to an increased awareness of the operations of race privilege). To disclose one's whiteness at the same moment as disclosing one's queerness is, however, an entirely different story. More specifically, to disclose that one is a white middle-class queer is often, in my experience, read as evoking an interesting 'yes but': I am white and middle-class, but I am also queer, with the identity category 'queer' somehow mitigating against accountability for the former two categories. In response to this, and as I will elaborate in this paper, what is required is an altogether different 'yes but': one that maintains a focus upon the operations of race and class privilege, and which refuses to let those of us who identify as white, middle-class and queer 'off the hook'.

Attempting to develop a different 'yes but' requires first of all a focus upon why the particular 'yes but' I identified above tends to predominate. I would suggest that this is the case due to the dominance of identity politics within queer communities, a form of politics that tends to reify an account of identity in which identity categories are treated as easily separable. The limitations of this account of identity have been challenged by post-identity politics (see May 2009 for a summary), yet my concern is that in challenging the homogenising and potentially marginalising effects of identity politics, post-identity politics fails to adequately account for the benefits gained by certain groups of queer people through identity politics. To be clear: my concern here is not that those of us who gained rights through political organising informed by identity politics are not 'grateful' enough *per se*. Rather, my concern is that 'moving beyond' identity politics potentially functions to dismiss the fact that only certain groups (i.e., white middle-class queers) have benefited from the rights secured by identity politics, and that these benefits must be accounted for. In response to this, I propose the rather awkwardly worded 'post identity politics identity politics' to capture both the fact that we need to move beyond identity politics (and their tendency to reify isolated identity categories and thus fail to examine the intersections of identities), but that we nonetheless need to recognise that identity categories continue to be understood by many people as reflecting

something 'real' about their experiences, and that the treatment of identity categories in this way produces very 'real' effects (e.g., by privileging the rights claims of certain groups of queer people over those of others). What is needed, then, is a white middle-class queer post-identity politics identity politics that holds those of us who inhabit this location to account for the privileges we have, and which does so by placing us in a relationship to those groups of people (queer or otherwise) who do not stand to benefit from the identity claims we make (and who indeed may be disadvantaged by the identity and rights claims made by white middle-class queers).

Of course it could be argued that developing a post-identity politics identity politics as it applies to white queer middle class people will do little more than increase the airspace accorded to this group of people. I, however, would argue contrarily. Whilst it is of course the case that much of what we know about the lives of queer people (defined here as people who variously identify as non-heterosexual and/or non-gender normative) is in reality information about the experiences of white middle-class lesbians and gay men (Clarke and Peel, 2007), this is not the same as intentionally developing an account of white middle-class queer subjectivities, and it is certainly nothing like stating that those of us who identify as white, middle-class, and queer must be accountable for our location. A post-identity politics identity politics of white middle-class queerness may thus go some way toward addressing these two gaps, and in so doing take up the challenge set by Fiona Nicoll (2000) to step out from merely having a 'perspective' on whiteness (and I suggest here middle-classness) as a white middle-class queer person, and instead to elaborate a situated understanding of what it means to inhabit this identity in a world where identity claims are made to matter.

In order to elaborate the approach I have outlined above, I undertake in the remainder of this paper three areas of focus that build upon one another: 1) I outline the identities that constitute the category 'white middle-class queer', and I explore the requirement of accountability that they produce, 2) I propose from this the need to understand the simultaneities of white middle-class queer experience and I engage in an elaboration of this via a reworking of identity politics so as to produce an account of (inter)subjectivity that evokes a 'turning toward the other' (Ahmed, 2004), and 3) I apply this reworking through an engagement with the work of Jodi Dean (1996; 2006) to an examination of state sanction in relation to white middle-class queers, with a focus on the

development of respectful communities of difference. In undertaking this three staged approach I engage with debates over understandings of difference and identity as they have previously appeared in the pages of *Ethnicities* (e.g., Anthias, 2002; Brubaker, 2003; Rooney, 2005), but extend them in useful ways with specific reference to a white middle-class queer praxis that aims to be accountable for this privileged configuration of identities.

Identity Categories/Identity Politics

In his work on ‘possessive investments in whiteness’, Lipsitz (1998) suggests that white people benefit from the logic of identity politics, and the ways in which they operates to legitimise individualised identity categories. In my own work on white middle-class queer subjectivities (Riggs, 2006), and drawing on the seminal work of Wendy Brown (1994) and Amina Mama (1995), I have explored some of the ways in which identity politics function within white middle-class queer communities to claim a ‘damaged identity’ for white middle-class queers when we are refused certain rights. In examining these claims I identified the similarities between such claims and those made by white (nominally heterosexual) people on the political right, both within Australia and the US, who use similar claims to ‘damage’ to justify their own racist agendas. Making recourse to singular identity categories as a form of politics is thus problematic for the ways in which it potentially renders white middle-class queers complicit with possessive investments in whiteness and middle-classness that serve to shore up white middle-classness as a privileged identity.

In the following subsections I thus outline not simply some of the constitutive components of the category ‘white middle-class queer’, but I also examine their intersections and the limitations of how each category is currently understood as applied to queer people. And importantly for my overall argument in this paper, I also highlight the forms of accountability that each of these identity categories produce.

Whiteness

Much can be said about the growing body of research focusing on whiteness, and certainly not all of this will be positive. Important questions continue to be raised as to the critical functions of 'critical race and whiteness studies', not the least of which being the risk it runs of reifying whiteness as even more all-encompassing than it actually is (e.g., see Ahmed, 2004). Nonetheless, critical race and whiteness studies offers a sustained critique of how white hegemony is perpetuated; how white privilege functions; and the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of whiteness as a form of cultural capital operating in a context of racial hierarchies.

One of the important tasks that critical race and whiteness studies perform is that of 'queering' whiteness. In this usage the term 'queer' refers not only to rendering that which is considered 'normal' potentially abnormal, but also engaging in the very practice of visibilisation. In other words, talking about white people as racialised, or speaking of the whiteness inherent to the law, or to health care, or to education, is to speak of something that is typically left unsaid or unrecognised *by white people*. To 'queer' whiteness, however, is not simply to speak its name, but also to show how the very fact that it is most often left *unsaid* represents the queer underpinnings of white hegemony – whiteness is queer in the sense that it relies upon being the unmarked norm, upon being that which is *not* seen by those of us who are white, at the very same time as it is clearly enunciated and enacted in everyday life. To queer whiteness is thus both to speak of it, and in so speaking to remark upon the oddness of the fact that it must be explicitly spoken of in order to be challenged. Recognising this queerness of whiteness entails enquiring as to what silences, hidden histories and myths have operated in the function of legitimating white hegemony.

Speaking of whiteness in regard to queer people requires us to examine how those of us who identify as white stand to benefit simply by the very fact of our racial categorisation as white. Whilst it is important to be mindful of ongoing critiques of racial hierarchies and their role as tools in the legitimation of racism, and whilst there is always a risk that in using categories such as 'white' we will contribute to the reification of racial categories, there is nonetheless a certain utility, I believe, in speaking of 'white queer middle-class people' (amongst other white people). It would be far too simple for an injunction to be placed upon speaking about race precisely at the moment when 'white people' as an analytic

category finally enters into white people's academic and activist work. Talking about whiteness is thus always already about deconstructing racial categories at the same time as recognising their ongoing effects and the privileges they accord to white people. Indeed, and as both Rogers Brubaker (2003) and Floya Anthias (2002) suggest in relation to identity categories, there is a necessary distinction between treating individuals or groups as 'real' or *a priori* categories (which would only serve to reify them), and treating them as analytic categories that are considered very much 'real' by those people who deploy them (i.e., the participants in our research). Examining whiteness as a constitutive category at the same time as recognising its constructedness is thus a vital aspect of the contribution that critical race and whiteness studies make to understanding white hegemony.

Queer

Of course the meaning of the word 'queer' as I used it in the previous section (as referring to something being 'odd' or 'unusual') is somewhat different to the meaning of the word when I employ it to talk about 'white middle-class queers' or in reference to 'queer theory'. Indeed, and in the context of the latter, to queer is precisely to refer to something that perhaps cannot be marked, something that challenges normative forms of naming. Yet, in the context of the previous discussion of whiteness, I do believe that there is great utility in *misusing* the term 'queer' in order to highlight its potentially unsteady foundations as a critical or radical term.

As it is perhaps most commonly used, the term 'queer' (within academic circles at least) refers to a critique of normative binaries of both gender and sexuality, with the notion of fixed categories and stable identities being thrown into question. In this sense, to queer is to resist normalisation, to resist the domestication of non-heterosexual sexualities, and to resist the imposition of yet another normalising interpretive framework. Yet, if we are to acknowledge that the history of 'queerness' as radical resistance has largely been framed by the agendas and theorising of white people (Barnard, 2003; Thomas, 2007), then it may become more obvious as to the potential utility of, at least to some extent, domesticating 'queer'.

To elaborate: If one aspect of a ‘queer project’ is to denaturalise binaries or social norms, and if certain dominant aspects of this project are centrally concerned with, or have been led by, white queers, then the process of denaturalising the location of whiteness *within* queerness may involve, at least in part, the necessary domestication of white queers. In other words, tying white queers back to the identity category ‘white’, whilst potentially being antithetical to the refutation of fixed identity categories, may nonetheless serve the function of queering – it may work to highlight the complex racial tensions that underpin equal rights movements, and which shape the voices that are heard within the context of queer theory. This, as I elaborate throughout this paper, is part of the work of developing a post identity politics identity politics as it applies to white middle-class queers.

Importantly, such an approach to queering (which is reminiscent of Fuss’ (1989) elaboration of ‘strategic essentialism’) may function not only to remind those of us who identify as white middle-class queers of our location within structural racism and classism and individual race and class privilege, but also to contribute to the aforementioned queering of whiteness, where whiteness is shown to be more complex than it would at first appear – it is never simply a heterosexual whiteness. To posit a fundamental (race) privilege held by white queers is thus not necessarily antithetical to a queer project. Indeed, it may extend such a project by acknowledging both resistances to certain social norms (i.e., those relating to sexuality), and the ongoing enactment of other norms (i.e., in regards to race) that privilege white people. The two (resistance and privilege) are thus inseparable.

To speak of ‘queer’ within the subject position ‘white middle-class queer’ is thus to acknowledge the multiple and shifting sexual identities claimed by non-heterosexual people, but to nonetheless locate us/them within a relationship to a range of social norms other than simply those associated with sexuality. This does not undermine the strength of ‘queer’ as a method of critique, but rather recognises how sexual identities are always already racialised – whilst sexual practices may cross a range of cultural contexts, the specific identities that are rendered intelligible in regard to sexuality are specific to the contexts (social, political, geographical, historical) within which they are situated (Riggs, 2007b; Thomas, 2007).

Class

As I mentioned earlier, the identity category of 'class' is one that is often overlooked in discussions of the experiences of queer people (Clarke and Peel, 2007). When socioeconomic status *is* considered, it is often in the reporting of the demographic details of research participants who are typically identified as middle-class. Socioeconomic status is also evident in recent research focusing on the 'pink dollar', which has examined how particular marketing campaigns or product lines are aimed specifically at certain quarters of queer communities, and how this affords some queer people access to having a voice in public economies. Indeed, an important aspect of research on the 'pink dollar' is the ways in which it draws our attention to matters of class privilege, and in particular the fact that some people within queer communities may have more access to disposable income than others. Yet the fact that middleclassness often only becomes visible when we are talking about queer economies would suggest to me that the category 'queer' (and especially the category 'white queer') is always already implicitly rendered intelligible through its assumption of middle-class values and beliefs. Examining the subject position 'white middle-class queer', as I do in this paper, is thus equally reliant upon a critique of class privilege *simultaneously* with a critique of racial privilege in the construction of the category 'white middle-class queer'.

Furthermore, and to return to a point I made in the introduction in relation to the ongoing deployment of identity categories, it has been suggested that socioeconomic status mediates the ways in which queer people describe and live our identities. In her research with lesbian women, for example, Weber (1996) suggests that categories such as 'butch' and 'femme' often hold clear class-based connotations, where some women very much identify as 'butch', despite a wider tendency within academia and queer political organising to disclaim the ongoing relevance of such identity categories. Weber suggests that some working class lesbian women feel a strong affinity for a 'butch identity', and that this affinity serves to validate their position in their social worlds. This again demonstrates the utility of developing a post identity politics identity politics, in that it allows a space for recognition of the fact that identity categories continue to matter in the lives of many queer people, and that treating them as *not* mattering anymore may often be the privileged province of certain groups of queer people.

Theorising Simultaneities

The above elaboration of what may be termed some of the ‘constitutive aspects’ of the category ‘white middle-class queer’ thus demonstrates the utility of what I have termed here a ‘post-identity politics identity politics’. Such an approach may serve to recognise that, yes, identities cohere around particular social groupings that represent historical (and most often ongoing) forms of oppression, but this does not mean that any one identity must be the *sole* identity through which political organising occurs. My social location, for example, is never simply the product of one of the identities I inhabit. Rather, the particular ways I move in the world are the result of me being a *white middle-class gay man*. I don’t sometimes live as gay, and sometimes live as white, and other times live as middle-class. Rather, I *always* live at the intersections of these identities.

An understanding of white middle-class queer subjectivities through the lens of a post-identity politics identity politics thus recognises the legitimacy of the experiences of those white middle-class queer people who may feel strongly that their identities are indeed fixed and singular, whilst nonetheless recognising that the very experience of fixity is the product of the intersections of multiple identity categories. In other words, identity categories achieve their semblance of fixity precisely because (for white middle-class queers) it is at times possible to focus on only one identity category. James Baldwin makes this point clear when he states: “I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, into a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly” (1987: 256). From this perspective, recognising any white middle-class queer person’s claims to singular identity categories need not render such claims invalid, but it must nonetheless involve examining how such claims are produced at the intersections of a range of identity categories. In the remainder of this section I outline one particular way of understanding intersectionality that provides an account of a white middle-class queer post-identity politics identity politics that is framed by notions of (inter)subjectivity. Drawing on my own previous work on notions of ‘love’ in regards to white queer rights claims, I suggest that claims to white middle-class queer subjectivities that seek to recognise their contingent foundations (within contexts of racism, classism and race and class privilege) must evoke a ‘turning toward the other’ (Ahmed, 2004). This involves the

situating of white middle-class queer subjectivities in a relationship to the fact that privilege is always already the corollary of disadvantage.

Loving Other-wise

In previous work (Riggs, 2006b) I have explored how the concept of 'love' within queer rights agendas (i.e., that 'love makes a [queer] family') functions to perpetuate a very normative understanding of parenting and families. In this sub-section of the paper I want to return to this critique and rework it in ways that recognise the dependencies and responsibilities of love in regards to white middle-class queer subjectivities, and how such a reworking may create possibilities for understanding white middle-class queer subjectivities that both recognise individual identity claims whilst at the same time locating them within a relationship to a broad range of social norms and the accountability this produces.

In my previous work I suggested that love-as-propriety potentially locks queer families into existing models of relationality that do not necessarily meet our needs, and which are in no ways automatically 'critical' of existing norms. I also questioned what it means to receive state sanction as a white middle-class queer parent in Australia, and I elaborated an understanding of love, following Irigaray (2002), that highlighted how discourses of love typically serve to lay claim to those other than ourselves as a right that one holds. As an alternative, I propose here that loving relations may instead be understood as a responsibility *to* another, one that results from our fundamental reliance *upon* another for our very sense of self. Such an approach engages with what may be termed 'loving other-wise' – engaging in both relationships with others and with oneself that are mindful of the centrality of those other than ourselves in the constitution of our subjectivities. To love wise of the other is not simply to recognise the existence of another, nor is to extend a benevolent gesture of inclusion toward another, but rather to recognise our fundamental contingency upon the existence of others.

To elaborate: Love as an ethical relationship is about caring for another precisely *because* they are not you, *because* you cannot know or have them, not *despite* all of that. We love others because they are *not* us – because they are different to us – because knowing them accords to us a sense of place in the world that comes from knowing where we stand in a relationship to another. Loving

another reminds us of our own uniqueness, precisely because that uniqueness is fundamentally reliant upon our relationship to that person who is not us – we are only unique in relationship to our difference from others. As such, we are fundamentally reliant upon another for our sense of self, and thus we owe them an existential debt. It is therefore not about what another can give me: they have already given *me*.

In other work on white subjectivities in Australia (Riggs, 2004), I have outlined how the claims of politicians to bestow ‘special rights’ to Indigenous people may actually be read as thinly veiled attempts at co-opting Indigenous people into a gift-like relationship, wherein by constructing Indigenous people as *active* recipients of government benefits, a gift relationship is created between the State and Indigenous people. By constructing government benefits as a gift (rather than reparation for genocide), politicians are able to call for something in return from Indigenous people, namely the acknowledgement of white belonging in Australia. Yet, as I suggested in that paper, the logic of the gift as applied to Indigenous-white relations in Australia ignores the fact that any recognition offered by Indigenous people represents the *initiation* of a gift relationship, not the return of a gift. I suggest this, following George Vassilacopoulos and Toula Nicolacopoulos (2004), on the basis of the fact that those of us who identify as white Australians require a recognition of our right to belong at an ontological level, and that, were Indigenous people to grant us this recognition, it would be us who is in debt, not Indigenous people.

Acknowledging this debt of recognition, then, forms the basis of an understanding of subjectivity that values the ways in which individuals choose to position themselves and claim identities, but which nonetheless sees such identities are always already located within a relationship to ongoing histories of colonisation and empire, both within Australia and internationally. I would suggest that the denial of these histories, and the conviction with which white subjectivities are often claimed in the face of the ongoing social marginalisation of a range of groups, represents a desire not to know difference (and its role in the constitution of the self).

To return to love, then, and drawing on the above discussion of accounts of difference and its role in the legitimation of white claims to belonging, a desire for a love that is *like* oneself is to desire *not* to know difference, or at very best to force difference into a logic of sameness, whereby knowing another is simply

knowing an altered version of oneself. Derek Hook (2005) writes of the desire for sameness in the context of the racial stereotype, where he suggests that the racial stereotype functions not by recognising another, but by reducing difference to sameness, whereby all people are marked according to the same hierarchical scale. To 'see' racial or sexual difference within this framework of sameness is thus only to see difference presented as sameness – as conforming to what is deemed an acceptable subjectivity for those differentially located within social hierarchies.

To continue with my focus on 'loving other-wise', and for an account of white middle-class queer subjectivity to be mindful of its racial and classed politics, it is important to recognise both how love functions in the service of social hierarchies (e.g., by privileging particular forms of love over others), but also how love to another may serve to recognise the fundamental indebtedness we have towards those through whom our own location is made possible. Writing as a white middle-class queer, and following Elizabeth Povinelli (2006), it may be possible to conceptualise an understanding of white middle-class queer subjectivities that recognises the contingency of the category descriptor 'white' upon legacies of violence, and in the context of colonial nations, ongoing histories of dispossession. To recognise this contingency is to recognise the debt that follows – not simply one of reparation for these histories (though that is an important aspect), but also one of responsibility and accountability to another through whom our sense of self is made possible.

My point here is of course not that the 'solution' to race or class privilege is for white middle-class queer people to enter into 'loving relationships' with (individual) people who do not identify as white and/or middle-class and/or queer. As Sara Ahmed (2004) suggests, it is important to be open to the fact that those other than ourselves may *not* wish to enter into relationships with us, and may *not* wish to recognise our identity claims. Nonetheless, my point is that we must move beyond the intimate sphere as it immediately surrounds our bodies, and instead consider the location of white middle-class queers within a broader social body whereby certain groups of people experience privilege at the expense of others. In this context, to recognise another and to be recognised by another is to acknowledge one's indebtedness to another not simply in the form of interpersonal interactions, but also in the broader context of recognition that requires white people more broadly to acknowledge that the benefits we accrue

under white heteropatriarchy are not shared by all. A white middle class queer post identity politics identity politics, at least as I have elaborated it thus far, may go some way towards recognising the responsibility that is owed by white middle-class queers for the privileges that we hold, and the ways in which those privileges always already sit in a relationship to the disadvantages experienced by others.

In the following section of the paper I take the relational understanding of white middle-class queerness that I have elaborated in this section, and apply it to understand how appeals to the law are made by white middle-class queer people. Following Dean (1996; 2006), I suggest that what is required is both the positioning of white people as benefactors of the whiteness inherent to the law, along with recognition of the fact that the law does not entirely encompass our identities. Such an understanding of the law, and drawing upon my points about our fundamental indebtedness to those other than ourselves, suggests an approach to recognition that locates us all within communities of difference.

The Law as ‘non-all’

The push for legal recognition of queer relationships has been suggested by some to be the province primarily of white middle-class queers who represent those most likely to benefit from state sanction. Certainly, as Darren Lenard Hutchinson (2000) suggests, marriage may be less attractive to queer African American people due to ongoing economic hardship, and the ways in which relationships with extended family (rather than marriage relations) may often be considered more important for sustaining individuals facing poverty. Hutchinson suggests that the poverty experienced by many African American queers means that the ‘benefits’ offered by legal sanction of queer relationships not only do very little to ameliorate poverty, but also do little to address the experience of living in a racist society that perpetuates such poverty.

A similar, though not analogous, argument may be made in regard to the experiences of working class white queers, who may well benefit from some aspects of changing laws aimed at recognising the rights of queer people, but may not benefit at all from other rights amendments. For example, a considerable proportion of legal change in regard to queer relationships has been concerned with securing inheritance, superannuation, and other financial benefits. The

push for changes such as these presumes that all queer people have the job security and employment options required to access superannuation and secure financial reserves that may be willed to partners or children. The understanding of legal sanction as I have represented here would suggest therefore that it is primarily the political goals of white middle-class queers that are being met in law reform campaigns, thus suggesting the necessity of examining precisely what legal sanction claims to promise, and the possibility for exploring alternate modes of seeking recognition for queer relationships.

In her work on Žižek, Dean (2006) provides us with one particular understanding of the law, and how it shapes our desires for sanction on very particular terms. Dean suggests that:

Law lets the subject think it could get what it wants were it not for law's prohibition. Here law lets the subject avoid the impossible Real of its desire. Our attachment to law is a symptom in that it is a way for us to secure our desire (that is to say, the space for it, not the object of it) by avoiding confrontation with the impossibility of fulfilling it (147).

Dean's argument here has particular implications for how we understand the quest for state sanction on the part of queer people. If the law is, as Dean suggests, fundamentally about the perpetuation of an illusion of freedom, and if this illusion results from the belief that legal sanction would represent an escape from persecution, then at least part of the struggle for recognition of queer relationships must involve reconsidering where we place the weight of recognition, and the possibility for shifting this away from the law. Otherwise, there is considerable risk associated with presuming that the granting of particular rights or the sanctioning of queer relationships by the State will result in the reduction of everyday discrimination against queer people. Whilst the law promises much in regards to meeting the needs and desires of those it purports to serve, casting a more critical eye upon the law would suggest that seeking legal sanction as the *sole* means of combating discrimination and social exclusion amongst queer people prevents us from considering alternate modes of recognition for queer relationships.

To this end, Dean (2006) provides us with an understanding of 'loving other-wise' that requires a radical reconfiguration of our relationship to the law.

In her work on Žižek, she suggests that an investment in the law as the primary site for identity recognition will always serve to perpetuate the hegemony of the law. Dean suggests, in contrast to this, that we may conceptualise the law as 'non-all' – whilst at a practical level it very much does arbitrate our ability to move in public spaces, it does not prevent us from claiming particular identities for ourselves that are beyond legislation. In other words, as long as the practices we engage in do not go against the letter of the law, our identity claims can exceed the limits of the law.

Dean's earlier work on feminism (1996) provides us with one way of understanding an approach to resistance to the law that begins at the intersubjective level. In this work Dean elaborates the concept of 'reflective solidarity', where she suggests that our engagement in practices of the self must be fundamentally engaged with accountability towards those other than ourselves. Importantly, Dean outlines the ways in which an understanding of 'reflective solidarity' offers ways of being in and through our relationships with others that does not deny differences (either as per identity politics and its potential to reify singular identity claims, or as per post-identity politics and the denial of the benefits of certain socially privileged markers of difference), but which instead takes difference as the primary site of political engagement.

Dean (1996) goes on to suggest that instead of conceptualising claims to rights from the perspective of the self, we must conceptualise them from the standpoint of the relationship we are in with others. From such a starting place we may be more likely to consider not only the implications of our rights claims for a wider range of people, but also to engage in ways of having our rights (and relationships) recognised in ways other than through the law. When we engage with the law, we are forced into relationships where the court and its representatives are positioned as able to decide between right and wrong. Taking recognition back into our own lives, and being mindful of the relationships and responsibilities we have to those other than ourselves, means that the ability to accord recognition is dispersed, thus broadening and strengthening the groups of people who can recognise our relationships.

Finally, Dean suggests that when we consider the values and beliefs of those other than ourselves, we remain open to interrogating our own privileges and limits, and to recognising the accountability that arises from our relationship to others. To 'love other-wise', then, and with particular reference to white

middle-class queer claims to relationship rights, it is important to pay particular attention not only to our immediate relationships, but also to the relationships we are in with broader communities. Recognising our contingency upon the existence of others would suggest that the rights claims of individuals must always be situated in the context of a broad range of rights claims.

Conclusions: A Different ‘Yes But’

To return to the introduction of this paper, then, my suggestion has been that we need a different ‘yes but’. This would be one that doesn’t simply reverse the order of the components of the ‘yes but’ I outlined in the introduction (‘yes I am white and middle-class but I am queer’), but which also changes the meaning and purpose of the qualification inherent in the ‘yes but’ statement. To say ‘yes I am white and middle-class but I am queer too’ is to claim some distance from white middle-class hegemony. To say instead ‘yes I am queer but I am also white and middle-class’ does more than simply reverse the logic; it also throws into question the category queer as one that automatically evokes an unqualified experience of marginalisation. This alternate ‘yes but’ highlights that being queer is always contingent – it is contingent upon the context in which one lives and the resources to which one has access.

Such an approach to a white middle-class queer praxis may go at least some way towards addressing the politics of representation that often cohere around who can speak for whom. Certainly I cannot speak for the experiences of white middle-class lesbian women any more than I can speak for the experiences of white middle-class trans people. But I can speak to what it means to be a white middle-class queer person, if my speaking serves as a form of recognition of the privilege that white middle-class queers hold relative to people not identified as white or middle-class, and the ensuing responsibility for our location as white middle-class people. Speaking as a white middle-class queer thus does part of the work of developing a notion of (inter)subjectivity that is shaped through a post-identity politics identity politics, in that it allows for a speaking position that coheres around a particular group identity, but it recognises the contingency and limitations of that identity, and the implications of *to* whom and *for* whom one speaks.

Understanding white queer subjectivities as contingent upon their location within racial and class-based hierarchies is an important contribution of the praxis that I have outlined within this paper. Whilst qualifications to the category 'white middle-class queer' will always be called for, and will often be granted, starting from an acknowledgement of white middle-class queer race privilege allows for an account of white middle-class queer subjectivities that is perhaps somewhat less mired in a reactionary account of identities, and which instead takes a broad range of social contexts as its starting point. To speak as a white middle-class queer is thus no less inherently problematic, but it is perhaps somewhat less disingenuous in its disclosure – to disclose one's identity as a white middle-class queer person, whilst not particularly novel, is to recognise one's queer location as both complicit with, whilst also marginalised by, the functions of white heteropatriarchy.

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